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ABSTRACT

Noting that many students do just enough schoolwork to get by and fail to see the connection between learning in school and success in adult life, this brochure encourages parents to explain the benefits of studying hard to their children. The brochure contains facts parents can use to explain the benefits to their children and suggests things that parents and other adults can do to encourage student achievement. Facts supporting studying efforts include the relationship between years of education and money earned as adults, the need for a good education to compete in the global job market, the relationship between skills and future earnings, and the importance of taking challenging courses in high school. Suggestions for parents and other adults include: (1) encouraging children to take challenging courses in middle and high school; (2) making clear that school is the number one priority for young people; (3) examining one's own beliefs about achievement and the messages sent to students; (4) encouraging and supervising children's studies at home; (5) becoming involved with teens' school activities; and (6) helping to create a society that values academic achievement. The brochure concludes with a message to students. (KB)

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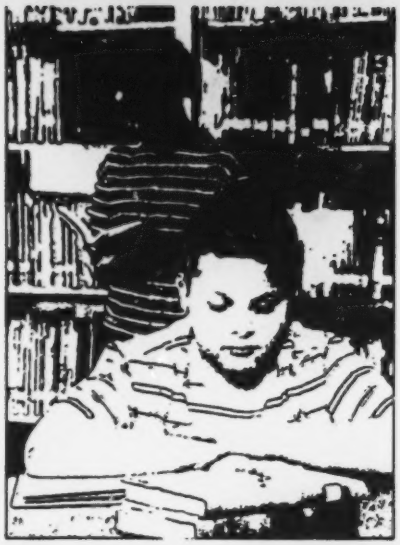

Tell Your Children

IT Pays TO STUDY HARD!

Teachers, principals, and other educators are working hard to improve American schools and raise student achievement. But they can't do it alone.

Learning takes effort from students, too.

Unfortunately, many young people do just enough schoolwork to get by. They fail to see the connection between learning in school and success in adult life.

AS PARENTS, you're in the best position to help your children understand the benefits that come to those who study hard. This brochure contains facts you can use to explain these benefits to your children. It also suggests things that you and other adults can do to encourage student achievement and ends with a short message for students.

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WHY IT *Pays* TO STUDY HARD

"What we expect from students is what we get. American students are smarter than we think; they can rise to any reasonable expectation, but we need to give them our support and the opportunity to achieve the higher standards."

—U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley

Here are some facts about why it pays to study hard. It's useful for your children to have this information by the time they enter middle school. That's when they start making decisions about courses that will affect their future.

The more years of education your children complete, the more money they'll probably earn as adults . . . and the better their chances will be of getting and keeping a good job.

D In 1997, the average adult with a high school diploma earned $6,300 more per year than the average high school dropout, and was less likely to become unemployed. Adults with a four-year college degree earned $14,000 more per year, on average, than those with a high school diploma—enough to make a real difference in how a person lives. Adults with a graduate degree or a law, business, or medical degree had the highest average incomes.

Your children will need a good education to compete in today's—and tomorrow's—global job market.

D More than half of today's jobs require at least some education beyond high school. In growing fields like health care, high tech, and office occupations, more than two-thirds of new jobs require some postsecondary education. For jobs that don't require higher education, employers still want workers with good math, science, reading, writing, and thinking skills.

Your children's future depends not just on whether they have a diploma or degree, but also on how much they actually learned in school or college.

D People who know a lot generally earn more money and have more interesting jobs than others with the same diploma or degree who don't know as much. For example, college graduates who are very good at reading texts, using everyday documents, and working with numbers earn almost $300 more per week than college graduates with lower literacy skills.

D High school graduates with good literacy and number skills have better career options and eventually earn more than those with low skills, who may be stuck in low-wage service or laboring jobs. By age 30, for example, high school graduates who did not attend college but scored in the top one-fourth in math on an armed services aptitude test earned 38% more per hour, on average, than those who scored in the bottom one-fourth.

Taking challenging courses is a good idea whether your children are headed for college, technical training, or work.

D Taking a rigorous curriculum in high school—such as four years of English, two years of laboratory science, two years of a foreign language, and math beyond algebra 2—is a better predictor of whether a young person will *graduate* from college than either high school grades or test

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scores. Students who begin taking challenging courses like algebra in the 8th grade will be better prepared for rigorous high school courses.

D All students, not just those bound for college, benefit from taking challenging courses. Many popular two-year degree or technical certificate programs, such as business, nursing, or computer science, require students to complete math beyond algebra. Fields ranging from auto mechanics to tourism now rely on technology, and students headed for work after high school will be more likely to succeed if they have strong math and science skills.

Knowledge can improve your children's quality of life.

D Learning brings benefits that can't be measured in dollars and cents. People who are well-educated are better prepared for today's complex society. They can make informed decisions, solve problems at work and home, and explore many interests. They can use their knowledge to make society better and teach their own children.

Young people who study more learn more.

D Success doesn't just come naturally. Most successful people, whether pilots or screenwriters, got where they are through hard work. School is the same way. For example, students who spent more time each day on homework or reading had higher scores on national tests than those who spent less time.

For more details about these issues and a list of sources, please see the full report, "Tell Your Children—It Pays to Study Hard! Long Version," on the Center's Web site at www.ctredpol.org. Go to our Publications page and look under Guides for Parents.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

"I believe every high school in America should add at least one advanced course each year for the next 10 years, so by 2010 every high school would have at least 10 advanced courses."
—U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley

1 Encourage your children to take challenging courses in middle and high school.

D Talk with your children about their future education and career goals. Help them map out which courses they will need. If you aren't sure, ask a school counselor or teacher. Make sure your children understand why it's important to take courses like algebra in middle school. If your school district doesn't offer advanced high school courses, work with others to change this situation.

2 Make clear that school is the number one priority for young people.

D It's normal for your child to want to participate in sports and other activities, but make sure academics receive high priority. Keep tabs on activities that take time away from learning. Limit the hours students work, if they must work at all, and make sure their studies don't suffer. Students who work more than 20 hours a week generally earn lower grades, spend less time on homework, cut class more, and cheat more often.

WHAT *you* CAN DO

3 Look at your own beliefs about achievement and the messages you send.

D Make sure your own words and actions send a positive message about school achievement. Make clear that effort counts more than inborn ability. When we say such things as, "I just don't have a head for math," or "He's a born artist," we may signal to our children that it's not worth trying things that don't come easily.

D Hold high expectations, and back up teachers who maintain high standards. Parents who put down teachers, pressure them to give their children higher grades than they deserve, or blame tests for being too hard are sending mixed messages about achievement.

4 Encourage and supervise your children's studies at home.

D Make space and time at home for serious study, and monitor your children's homework. Children who discussed their studies at home at least once a week had higher average scores on a national reading test than those who discussed studies less often. Children will learn more if you offer homework guidance, instead of answers.

5 Become involved with your teenager's school activities.

D High school students do better when their parents take an active interest in their studies and attend school activities. Yet more than 40% of parents of high school students never attend school activities.

6 Help to create a society that values academic achievement.

D Teenagers sometimes ridicule kids who make an effort in school. Children also pick up negative messages about achievement from television, movies, music, and even casual adult conversation. The values you instill will help your children stand up to outside pressure. You can also enlist support from other people that your children admire.

D All of us can encourage student achievement. Employers can pay more attention to courses taken when hiring young workers. Educators can help people understand why certain courses are important and why high standards are necessary. Community groups can set up programs to recognize high-achieving young people. The whole nation benefits when students learn more and become more productive citizens.

a message to students

IT PAYS TO STUDY HARD!

The person who has the most impact on your future is *you!*

Here are some reasons why you should study hard in school:

- If you complete more years of education, you will earn more money and be better prepared for a career that interests you.
- If you learn a lot while you're in high school or college, you'll probably earn more money than someone with the same diploma or degree who didn't learn as much.
- If you take challenging courses in middle and high school, you are more likely to attend college and complete a degree. And if you take challenging courses and start work right after high school, you'll be better qualified for a good job with opportunities for raises and promotions.

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